In spite of this fact, Pesko’s Beyond Calvin succeeds in proving its fourfold thesis and furnishes students with thought-provoking material on a vital aspect of historic Reformed orthodoxy.

—Ryan M. McGraw


Since 1972 there has been—for all intents and purposes—no strictly Presbyterian movement in England. In that year what had been known as the Presbyterian Church of England entered into union with the greater part of the Congregational Union of England and Wales to form the United Reformed Church. The Presbyterian body that ceased its separate existence in 1972 was itself a church of largely nineteenth-century origin, comprised extensively of expatriate Scots who, on migrating south, formed congregations and came into union with the much-diminished remains of Presbyterian Nonconformity, traceable back to Restoration times. One might wonder, in the light of this chain of events, whether an attempt (such as Ha’s) to write the history of the movement in late Elizabethan and early Jacobean times is not an example of antiquarianism, plain and simple. Is it not relating the story of a movement that had vanished? It is not this at all; it is in fact an attempt to resolve a long-standing historical conundrum.

The fact is, the “Presbyterian way” did not lack for vocal advocates in England in the 1640s, the decade when the English Parliament summoned the Westminster Assembly of Divines into existence (1643–1649). The eventual upshot of this Assembly’s deliberations was, in addition to a Confession of Faith and Catechisms, a not very successful national experiment with the Presbyterian system as an alternative to the episcopal governance of the National Church. The conundrum that has occupied historian Polly Ha throughout her Cambridge dissertation research (now made available to us in this volume) is that of explaining how Presbyterian polity could have English advocates in abundance at a time when, by all standard accounts during the last century or more, the Presbyterian movement within the English national church had been decisively crushed half a century earlier. At Queen Elizabeth I’s behest, Archbishop John Whitgift (1590–1604) pursued a policy of harassment and repression against this movement, personified by Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) and Walter Travers (1548–1635). These repressive policies were continued by the first Stuart Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Bancroft (1544–1610).

Earlier historians such as R. G. Usher (1905) and the biographers of Cartwright (F. Scott Pearson, 1925) and Travers (S. J. Knox, 1972) had fairly set in stone this story line of the demise of Presbyterian advocacy in Elizabeth’s reign. It had also been given fresh circulation in the massive and magisterial study of Patrick Collinson, The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (1967), but it has not held for two reasons.

First, attention has come to be paid to the survival of voices for the Presbyterian point of view (within Anglicanism) in out-of-the-way venues that were beyond the reach of Canterbury. The recent critical biography of the career and influence of Irish archbishop, James Ussher, (1581–1656) by Alan Ford (2007) has shown that Ussher welcomed the assistance of Anglican clergy of Presbyterian sympathies as the newly Protestantized Irish church struggled to establish itself in the face of a recalcitrant Catholicism. Similar investigation has shown that Presbyterian sympathizers found both ordination and ministry opportunity within English trading communities at Antwerp and Amsterdam.

Second, and building on this ongoing research, Ha has uncovered important manuscript evidence of the clandestine ongoing literary and epistolary activity of Walter Travers, from Trinity College Dublin (where he had come to be associated with James Ussher) on behalf of the ongoing Presbyterian cause. Such activity may have been forbidden to Travers while resident in England, but it was not forbidden him in Dublin, so long as he gave outward conformity to the Protestant Church of Ireland. The cache of documentary evidence that Ha uncovered at Dublin had eluded earlier researchers using the same archives mainly because of its earlier misattribution to Ussher.

As portrayed by Ha, English advocates for the Presbyterian way coped with the unprouitous times in which they lived during a half-century by (1) maintaining informal networks of influence in which the writings of Travers and others were circulated, (2) by taking ministry assignments abroad as necessary (whether in Ireland, New England, or the trading communities within the Netherlands), (3) by securing appointments across England as privately funded “lecturers” whose teaching and preaching ministries in Church of England congregations (on weekdays or Sunday evenings) augmented the ministry of the local pastor, and (4) by finding (among the same business and parliamentary class that financed the private lectureships within England and Protestant English congregations abroad) fellow advocates for the termination of episcopacy. This coalition comprised of rising businessmen, county magistrates, and members of Parliament (as well as ministers) desired an England in which the dominant pre-Reformation influence of bishops in national political and judicial life would be curtailed as a thing at variance with ideas of responsible government.

Ha has done her research assiduously, though—truth be told—her text of 187 pages plus extensive notes advances at such glacial speed as to make for very heavy going. Ha cannot be faulted for some imagined failure to tell a good story. The strength of her book is its diligent tracing of connections across England’s counties, the North Sea, the Irish Sea, and the Atlantic. The early seventeenth-century English Presbyterian movement she now
depicts was (like Anglicanism) committed to a national church that tended toward religious comprehension of as much of the population as possible. It was, like Anglicanism, standing in the broadly Reformed theological tradition. Nevertheless it self-consciously differed from Anglicanism (just as it differed from an emergent movement of independents, led by Henry Jacob [1563–1624]) by its insistence on the conciliar governance of England's national Protestant Church. Conciliar governance as they conceived it would involve congregational elders working in league with their pastor to maintain discipline among professed Christians; it would involve regional presbyteries or classes (already observable in Scotland and on the Continent), and it would involve national synods. Such a conciliar polity would self-consciously distinguish between matters of state and matters of the church. Those who advocated it labored hard to demonstrate that England's constitution of king and Parliament would not be undermined by it. All this was being thrashed out and articulated informally across the decades from 1590–1640.

Thus, here—at last—we are supplied with a convincing account of the Presbyterian movement's survival in unpropitious times. If it is not the account of what is, to this day, a thriving expression of the international Reformed family, it remains a helpful and convincing account of how the mid-seventeenth-century movement that culminated in the production of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms exerted itself powerfully after a half-century of supposed interment and struggled on through the seventeenth century until the 1662 Act of Uniformity permanently marginalized it in England.

—Kenneth J. Stewart


Kelly M. Kapic briefly introduces readers to the study of theology. From college students taking their first theology class to those who are answering God's call to seminary to experienced theologians who need to be reminded about the importance of their work, this book delivers on its promise to explain why and how to study theology.

Throughout the book, he draws on the wisdom of a wide variety of theologians from every era, including Augustine, Anselm, Calvin, Warfield, and Bavinck as well as current names such as Charry, Oden, and Volf. This is in keeping with his emphasis that theology is not to be done in isolation. Good theology is the product of the ecclesial community—past and present.

Kapic affirms the centrality of Scripture for all good theology. He distinguishes between a narrow biblicism that ignores genre, context, and other matters, and a proper study of the Bible that is open to the leading of the Spirit. "Good, orthodox, worship-inducing theology," he writes, "must