

Book Reviews

Andrew S. Ballitch, *The Gloss and the Text: William Perkins on Interpreting Scripture with Scripture* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2020).

Despite being one of the most influential English Protestants of his day, William Perkins (1558–1602) has received relatively minimal dedicated attention from scholars until roughly the last decade. From 2014 through 2020, Perkins’s works were republished in modern English in their entirety for the first time and three major monographs covered Perkins. One of these is Andrew Ballitch’s *The Gloss and the Text*. Ballitch’s work is a lightly edited version of his 2017 PhD thesis entitled, “‘Scripture is Both the Glosse and the Text’: Biblical Interpretation and Its Implementation in the Works of William Perkins.”

Ballitch’s thesis is that “William Perkins interpreted Scripture with Scripture by using three tools: context, collation, and the analogy of faith” (3). For Ballitch, context “is a close reading of the text in terms of the argument and literary features,” collation is “a comparison with other passages,” and the analogy of faith is “the boundaries of the Reformed tradition” (3). Ballitch contends that this three-part exegetical method is the hermeneutical principle Perkins himself teaches in *The Arte of Prophecyng*. Ballitch asserts that Perkins used this method to expound Scripture throughout his corpus regardless of the genre of writing Perkins undertook. Ballitch seeks to prove his thesis by examining Perkins’s works genre-by-genre and showing how these three tools constituted Perkins’s method of interpretation.

In his opening chapter, Ballitch provides an overview of his thesis and a brief summary of the existing research on Perkins and Perkins’s exegesis. Ballitch contends that exegesis constituted a major matter for Perkins and scholars have largely missed this topic. Ballitch also highlights the fact that many of Perkins’s works originated as sermons. In chapter two, Ballitch

provides a biographical sketch on Perkins. Next, drawing especially on the work of Richard Muller, Ballitch offers a historical survey of patristic, medieval, and early Reformation exegesis. Chapters 3 through 6 form the core of the book as the author systematically works through Perkins's writings in order to prove the thesis that Perkins's exegetical method consists of employing context, collation, and the analogy of faith. Ballitch divides Perkins's works into four categories: sermons and commentaries (chapter 3), practical works (chapter 4), theological works (chapter 5), and polemical works (chapter 6). In the final chapter, Ballitch summarizes his thesis and briefly shows how his work corrects as well as adds to Donald McKim's study on Perkins. In opposition to some strains in Perkins's scholarship, Ballitch sees Perkins as a Puritan, though Ballitch largely avoids the thorny question of defining what he means by "Puritan."

Since Ballitch discusses Perkins's works individually and in substantial detail, *The Gloss and the Text* serves as a helpful primer for many of Perkins's treatises. Before discussing a particular text of Perkins, Ballitch often provides a pithy summary of Perkins's treatise as well as brief historical context about the work and the social climate that might have shaped Perkins's thought. While Perkins was hardly unique in the way Scripture dominated his writing, Ballitch winsomely brings out this important part of Perkins's theological method.

Perhaps the most significant strength of *The Gloss and the Text* is its assiduous engagement with primary sources. The author uses both the original printing of Perkins's treatises and the collected 1631 edition of his works. In total, Ballitch makes hundreds of references to Perkins's writings across nearly all of Perkins's corpus. Ballitch also provides periodic comparisons to the writings of Perkins's contemporaries. Ballitch shows deep knowledge of Perkins's corpus—a fact that is not surprising given that Ballitch co-edited one of the volumes of the recent replications of Perkins's works and has written articles on Perkins. However, Perkins's *Problem of Forged Catholicism*, which focuses extensively on citing the fathers yet still contains some engagement with Scripture, is absent from the extensive works of Perkins to which Ballitch gives substantial attention. Nonetheless, Ballitch proves his thesis through his examination of Perkins's works and drawing out, on hundreds of occasions, how Perkins used the three-part exegetical method to understand Scripture.

While Ballitch engages with academic literature on a few occasions to show that scholars have not discussed Perkins's exegesis adequately (5–17), to provide background to early modern England, and to explain how *The*

Gloss and the Text contributes to broader scholarly conversations (222–27), the majority of the book proffers minimal engagement with the wider academic discussion. Similarly, Ballitch largely misses interaction with some previous discussions of Perkins’s exegesis such as the engagement of the topic in David Barbee’s 2013 PhD dissertation. Nonetheless, for scholars interested in Perkins or Elizabethan exegesis, Ballitch’s work will be a helpful guide to the writings and exegesis of Elizabethan England’s most famous Protestant.

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Coffey, John, ed. *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, Vol. 1, *The Post-Reformation Era, 1559–1689* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

With this first of the five volumes comprising *The Oxford History of the Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, the authors have acceded to the unenviable task of summarizing, delineating, and reconstructing the nature of nonconformity from the Elizabethan Settlement to the Toleration Act of 1689. Emphasizing both the “contingency” of Dissent and the “fluidity” of denominational identities in the post-Reformation Anglophone world, this volume channels Patrick Collinson to shift the story of Dissent out of the clutches of denominational history and into the mainstream (15). To that end, its narrative structure, “diffusion and migration,” serves to trace the Dissenting traditions in their many and varied shades from sixteenth-century England to Wales, Ireland, Scotland, the Netherlands, and the British Atlantic (34). The story told here ultimately turns global, tilling the soil for the collection’s subsequent volumes, which attend to Dissent’s spread up through the twenty-first century.

Divided into four parts, the volume’s twenty-one chapters treat Dissent’s development geographically—both within and outside of England—and then thematically, exploring its socio-political, cultural, and theological contexts. These chapters incisively capture the contingency of the historical moment and shine a light on the way in which Dissent hung as a Damoclean sword of sorts over the national church after the Reformation. From Elliot Vernon’s “Presbyterians in the English Revolution,” to W. J. Sheils’s “Dissent in the Parishes,” the contributors make plain the precarious position of the ecclesiastical establishment throughout the post-Reformation