

Albertoni notes ‘how misleading it can be to apply rigid confessional categories to the faithful of the sixteenth century’. Studies of radicalism have flourished in the years between this and the earlier bibliography. That topic finds its place here as a section within ‘Theological and Intellectual Currents’. More could be made, however, of important modern research, which views radicalism as a state of mind, psychological as much as cerebral or intellectual.

Good bibliographies are built on discerning choices about categories and where people fit. Albertoni has Reginald Pole simply as part of ‘Men and Women’, and not forced under dated titles like ‘counter-reformation’ or the once-favoured ‘catholic reformation’. He might have been allowed at least one foot in ‘Nicodemism’ – but that’s another story. Two very long lists represent outstanding modern contributions; first, without doubt, is that of Massimo Firpo and his collaborators and second, that of the talented American researcher Thomas Mayer, who died whilst this work was in preparation. Pole, ‘the missing pope’, was an Italianate Englishman and it is encouraging to find many studies here which set him in the European world where he belonged. That greater Europe was also the backdrop for the courageous humanist, Olimpia Morata, who moved as a refugee from the Ferrara court to Bavaria, and then to Heidelberg. The excellent modern Morata studies listed here, many of them in article form, signal the turn towards the influence of women and towards the vital role of humanists in Italy’s reform. The editor contextualises *Il beneficio di Cristo* within a section called ‘Evangelism, Valdesianism’. Thus he avoids setting that contested ‘libriccino’ in a special lonely eminence, as often happens, and as Tedeschi and Lattis did. In Albertoni’s work, *Il beneficio* is encountered at the crossroads of theology and history, Catholicism and Protestantism, no longer the exceptional text of Italian reform, but derivative, disorganised and inconsistent like most other religious works of the period.

Vincenzo Lavenia’s historiographical introduction sets the scene perfectly: his own sympathies are clear, but so is his rare understanding as he probes the kaleidoscopic debates of the last two decades, about Italian reform, the recurring religious crises and ‘the post-Cantimori shift’. His words on the complex effects of ‘the global turn’ (pp. 36–7) deserve application to reformation studies everywhere. At times, both Albertoni and Lavenia could have interspersed their comments with more caution about definition, especially of the ‘isms’ – Evangelism, Valdesianism, Radicalism, Waldensianism and Nicodemism: all these appear in the contents list and frequently thereafter. In an English language volume such tortuous words are likely to prompt fretful mutterings about examining terms. These are largely cultural and linguistic matters; they count for little beside the scholarship, wisdom and sheer enthusiasm that created such a challenging volume.

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*Nicodemites. Faith and concealment between Italy and Tudor England.* By M. Anne Overell. (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History.) Pp. xiv + 280. Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2019. €125. 978 90 04 33166 2; 2468 4317  
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Accounts of reformation long focused on those who resisted and suffered for their faith: these loud voices were both easier to hear and more pleasing to their

brethren than those of the much quieter, and much less brave, majority who avoided persecution by concealing their faith – by becoming ‘Nicodemites’ – rather than standing up to it. Recent work has found rich possibilities of doing so.

One reason for a bigger place for religious ambiguity, co-existence and for confessional exchange, is that it is still all too easy to dismiss those who simply conformed. Overell’s work addresses this and shows why such figures and ideas have attracted less attention from scholars because the perception is that those who reluctantly reformed must have been more static, more reactive and therefore less capable of driving historical and religious change than those willing to defy. Overell disproves this in a work that is above all about movement, change and exchange. This is a book about nicodemism ‘between Italy and England’. Overell argues that, deterred by Carlo Ginzburg’s much criticised claims for a pan-European nicodemism in his *Il nicodemismo*, scholars have failed to consider the exchange and connections of ideas about religious concealment and conformity across political, national and confessional divides, and she ably demonstrates just how rich this exchange was.

Following a prologue in which Overell lays out both the historiography and her guiding principles, *Nicodemites* is divided into two sections. The first of these, ‘Lives’, is concerned with what Overell describes as the ‘doings’ (p. 8) of those she identifies as nicodemites. The first chapter lays the groundwork for this section, describing the groups historically associated with concealment and the biblical and patristic precedents for attitudes towards such groups, and offering brief sketches of the development of religious reform in both England and Italy. From there this section proceeds through a series of case studies. Two chapters devoted to Reginald Pole and the circles of men he gathered around him in Italy do much to showcase the value of probing at Anglo-Italian relations, as Overell shows the compromises and possibilities of lives lived across two countries and several religious regimes. This is demonstrated with deep research, with the evidence of book inventories being used to shed revealing light on both the intriguing figure of Michael Throckmorton, and the much better-known figure of Reginald Pole.

This work on Pole is one of the most important elements of this book, but it also demonstrates the frustrations and difficulties of the concept and boundaries of ‘nicodemism’. Ultimately, for this reviewer, Overell’s case that Pole was and remained a ‘pious nicodemite’ (p. 75) did not fully convince; it is absolutely clear that his beliefs were idiosyncratic and that contemporaries recognised hesitancy in his persecution, but whether this really amounts to a secret and dissident piety in the archbishop of Canterbury is far less certain. After all, as Overell asks in the following chapter ‘could anyone ... live through these five decades of Tudor rule and never deceive?’ (p. 77). If everyone, even those directing religious change and condoning the deaths of others in its name, is a nicodemite, then the category loses some of its analytical utility. There are some of the same problems of definition in the final two chapters of this section, which offer up the ambassador Pietro Vanni and the nobleman (and frequent prisoner) Edward Courtenay as examples. These, again, are deeply researched and thought-provoking accounts, but the label of ‘nicodemite’ sometimes feels too precise a category in which to place these men. The line between a person concealing and a person

experiencing and expressing genuine fluctuation and ambivalence is not always sharp.

The second section of Overell's work takes not individuals but texts as the subjects of its case studies. The first of these focuses on *Il beneficio di Cristo* and its first English translation, undertaken by the aforementioned Edward Courtenay. Overell's detailed analysis opens a window into theological fluidity and exchange in the early reformation, as identities crystallised and changed the context of a many-layered text. The next two chapters range over more texts, focusing on the polemics of Pier Paolo Vergerio and various contemporary accounts of the recantation, remorse and death of Francesco Spiera. The latter of these, which might be familiar to some readers from Overell's article on the topic, is particularly deft: the case study demonstrates the strengths of Overell's approach in its movement not only across time and countries but also between an event that was itself stage-managed and its many and purposeful interpretations. The next chapter, focused on three texts published in 1555, is also particularly strong, showcasing not only a range of possible reactions to nicodemites but also the ways in which individual compassion could mitigate ideological condemnation.

The last two chapters in this section move from the crisis for English Protestants of 1555 to the reign of Elizabeth I, 'the queen of Nicodemites' (p. 186, quoting Peter Marshall). This focuses first on writers who urged against persecution and then on those, both Protestant and Catholic, who continued to write against those they perceived as nicodemites. Among the latter are texts we have already encountered, now reinterpreted and given new meaning under a new religious settlement. Indeed, as Overell shows in her final chapter, many of these texts continued to find new meanings across the seventeenth century and beyond as readers still grappled with what true spiritual devotion could and could not encompass.

This is an important book, which in its subject and approach, particularly in its focus on cultural exchange, makes an important contribution to the historiography. It is deeply researched and clearly written. Yet both the greatest strength and the greatest weakness of Overell's work is her refusal to define her terms and to boundary her study. She admits that the term 'Nicodemite' is so imprecise that there is a case that it could be 'best abandoned' (p. 3), and she leaves it uncapitalised to emphasise that it was not a movement. It was, she argues, a 'great spectrum of behaviour' (p. 234): so great, in fact, that 'people suspected of nicodemism did much the same as everyone else, only more fervently and fearfully' (p. 8). There is much that is admirable in illuminating fear, concealment and ambivalence as near-universal early modern religious experiences, but this lack of distinction means the analysis is perhaps more fruitful when applied to texts than to individuals.

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*How the English Reformation was named. The politics of history, c. 1400–1700.* By Benjamin M. Guyer. Pp. xiv + 220 incl. 1 fig and 1 table. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 978 0 19 286572 4  
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'History is not the study of origins; rather it is the analysis of all the mediations by which the past was turned into our present.' Benjamin Guyer's first book is a