



Being Protestant in Reformation Britain

Alec Ryrie

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The Reformation was about ideas and power, but it was also about real human lives. Alec Ryrie provides the first comprehensive account of what it actually meant to live a Protestant life in England and Scotland between 1530 and 1640, drawing on a rich mixture of contemporary devotional works, sermons, diaries, biographies, and autobiographies to uncover the lived experience of early modern Protestantism.

Beginning from the surprisingly urgent, multifaceted emotions of Protestantism, Ryrie explores practices of prayer, of family and public worship, and of reading and writing, tracking them through the life course from childhood through conversion and vocation to the deathbed. He examines what Protestant piety drew from its Catholic predecessors and contemporaries, and grounds that piety in material realities such as posture, food, and tears.

This perspective shows us what it meant to be Protestant in the British Reformations: a meeting of intensity (a religion which sought authentic feeling above all, and which dreaded hypocrisy and hard-heartedness) with dynamism (a progressive religion, relentlessly pursuing sanctification and dreading idleness). That combination, for good or ill, gave the Protestant experience its particular quality of restless, creative zeal.

The Protestant devotional experience also shows us that this was a broad-based religion: for all the differences across time, between two countries, between men and women, and between puritans and conformists, this was recognisably a unified culture, in which common experiences and practices cut across supposed divides. Alec Ryrie shows us Protestantism, not as the preachers on all sides imagined it, but as it was really lived.

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