

## Laudian and Royalist Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: the Career and Writings of Peter Heylyn

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Andrew Foster

This is an excellent book which does everything it proclaims and more. Anthony Milton is to be congratulated for his hard work, brilliant synthesis, and excellent and accessible presentation. This book is not a biography of Peter Heylyn, but we obviously learn a lot about the man as well as the writer. Nor is it an arid history of ideas divorced from context. Milton's great achievement is to set Heylyn's work thoroughly in context and to reveal how his ideas evolved over time, and how the works contain both contradictions yet also development of themes. Moreover, the book reveals just how the different strands of Heylyn's writings were all connected, whether one talks of the earlier and later geographical works, later polemical pieces, key tracts on specific issues or the final histories. And the connections reveal just how none of the works can be fully appreciated if taken in isolation or at face value.

Along the way Milton is excellent in dispelling myths. Heylyn was not one of Laud's chaplains, he does not even come across as having been terribly close to that ill-fated Archbishop of Canterbury; yet he was fiercely loyal to Laud. He was a royalist, but that did not mean that he was uncritical of either James I or Charles I – far from it in the case of the latter. Perhaps his biggest love was the Church of England, for which he was one who did use earlier than most the term 'Anglican', and of which his writing was to provide a particular and comprehensive history that has certainly stood the test of time. And Heylyn's interpretation incorporated a wider view of the Catholic Church while at the same time playing down continental influences and the work of the Edwardian Reformation.

Perhaps typical of the man, Heylyn was always sure of his enemies, whether they were specific people like

Bishop John Williams, John Prideaux or William Prynne, bodies like the Feoffees for Improvements and even Parliament, or groups of people like Puritans and Presbyterians. In keeping with recent work on altar policy in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the importance of personal rivalries – notably with John Williams – is highlighted. Heylyn is cleared of charges of being a political hack who simply wrote for money or the crown, but the importance of personal feuds in his motivation is not denied. Indeed, for what is not a biography we get a number of useful images of a rather lonely and isolated figure, not really part of any group even when the Laudians were in power, or when he was later one of those who nursed their ‘sufferings’ during the Interregnum. He depended greatly on his family for his survival. It is difficult to detect many influential patrons, one reason among several given for why he received no promotion on the Restoration. Heylyn was a difficult man to get on with, hence he was shunned by others at various stages in his life, yet he held true to certain ideals about the Church of England, the importance of episcopacy, the power of Convocation, and the royal supremacy, even when it was not employed with as much power as he would have liked.

After a crisp introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters, three of which cover the making of the polemicist, civil wars among the clergy, and the voice of Laudianism – in other words, Heylyn’s career prior to 1640. Three substantial chapters follow on prosecution, royalism and newsbooks during the civil wars, how Heylyn dealt with the Interregnum, and then the Restoration. And this is capped by a short conclusion that considers religion and politics in Heylyn’s career and writings. Although we have no fewer than three contemporary biographies of Heylyn – one composite appearing in a collection of Heylyn’s work, the other two by George Vernon and John Barnard – little attention has been given, apart from some important doctoral theses, to this controversial and prolific writer. Milton is typically generous in his acknowledgement of the work of these twentieth-century thesis writers, Anne Kendall, John Walker and Fred Trott.

Heylyn emerges as a complex character from the outset. His early interests lay with geography and it was not until he was in his fifties that he turned fully to theology and history and became famous as a controversialist. Like others in the Laudian fold, he also seems to have come from a fairly conformist background, initially holding standard beliefs in the Protestant Cause, although strangely an early supporter of the Spanish Match. He finally turned to theology and was ordained by Bishop John Howson in 1624. Visits to France and to the Channel Islands influenced his thinking about continental Protestantism and Presbyterianism. He became a royal chaplain in 1629 and was soon employed attacking the Feoffees for Improvements in a sermon given in 1630, despite the involvement of some members of his family in the project. This gained Laud’s attention and the latter presented the king with Heylyn’s book on *The Historie of St George*, a work which could be seen to include a defence of episcopacy as well as the main issue of the Knights of the Garter. A later work on Augustus, published in 1632, could be seen as a defence of the personal rule.

During the 1630s Heylyn worked with Noy against Prynne, but produced no real pamphlets for government before 1635. It was the Book of Sports that called him into that role, with his *History of the Sabbath* designed to be a companion to the work of Bishop Francis White. His more famous pamphlets of the late 1630s concerned the altar policy and Bishop John Williams, about which Milton writes that ‘even in a period notorious for the venomous style of its polemic, Heylyn’s exchanges with his dean exhibit remarkable reserves of vitriol’ (p. 60). In his exchanges with Henry Burton, Heylyn was used as a more acerbic foil to companion works by Laud in 1637, possibly the heyday of his work as a government polemicist. Thereafter Heylyn appears to have worked mainly on his history of the Reformation and on Convocation. No use was found for his pen in the attacks on the Scots at the end of the decade. He became a JP for Hampshire in 1640 and attended the famous Convocation that outran the Short Parliament. Here he promoted the idea of a standard set of visitation articles for the whole country, an interesting practical offering to support the work of his beloved bishops.

An important theme of this book is how many of Heylyn’s pamphlets and tracts were written in response to others, which often dictated the form of the argument. This explains why Heylyn cannot be charged with writing anything about Arminianism, which by the 1630s was a taboo subject. His efforts were largely spent in refuting Puritans and defending charges of innovations levelled at the work of the Caroline episcopate by

reference to a very different view of the English Reformation. For Heylyn, the early stages of the Edwardian Reformation were worthwhile before grasping courtiers gained control; cathedrals were the saviours of sound worship; and much depended on sensible interpretation of the Elizabethan Reformation. Heylyn was always an independent voice, never a mere mouthpiece for the Laudian regime, and one who was already developing a distinctive use of a carefully fashioned history of the Church of England.

Heylyn was fortunate to escape real persecution after 1640, even though he was hauled before a number of committees for his past pains; this may be because he linked so much of his writing directly to the king. He continued to publish works that at first sight seem fairly neutral, such as *A Help to English History* in 1641, a work on episcopacy in 1642 and material towards a *History of Liturgies* eventually published in 1657. Yet even these works reveal an interest in earlier history designed to refute charges of innovation in the 1630s. Heylyn moved from Alresford in Hampshire to Oxford and became the first editor of *Mercurius Aulicus* during 1643–4, but Milton feels he did not enjoy his role as a journalist and did not have the style for it either. In Oxford he found himself out of sorts with other clergymen and the court; he had no real patron and others like Hammond were anxious to promote peace and did not like the strident views of Heylyn. It was at this time that he wrote his first homage to Laud, *A Brief Relation of the Death and Sufferings of the Most Reverend and Renowned Prelate* (1644/5). Other works at this time on Parliament only served to leave him isolated for his continued defence of the bishops. Heylyn was passed over for the deanery of York in 1644 and he left Oxford for Hampshire where he compounded for his livings and moved to Minster Lovell. *The Undeceiving of the People in the Point of Tithes* published in 1647 can be taken as an apt commentary on the hard times of clergy.

Heylyn played no part in the pamphlet literature of the 1650s, nor was he active as a clergyman. Instead he retreated to an earlier scholarly interest and produced his longest book, *Cosmographie* in 1652. He also produced a tome on the creed in 1654. Neither work should be seen as neutral, however, for Milton shows a shift in Heylyn's previous sympathies for foreign Protestants, clear support for the secular powers of bishops, and – in the work on the creed – a further rebuttal of any charges of Popery. By this date, alas, Heylyn was almost blind, but this did not stop him from thinking he could advise Oliver Cromwell in *Ecclesia Vindicata* in 1657. Perhaps in that mood, his *Short View of the Life of Charles I* published in 1658 contained strong criticisms of that king. In the later 1650s Heylyn became embroiled in controversies with at least seven opponents, all concerned with interpretations of Laudianism. Even with moderates like Haman L'Estrange and Thomas Fuller, Heylyn still sought to blacken them as Puritans, while other exchanges with Bernard, Sanderson, Baxter and Hickman followed. These are not seen by Milton as particularly coherent exchanges, but the final work of this period, Heylyn's *Historia Quinqua Articularis*, marked a return to historical research, engagement with what Heylyn liked about 'Melanchthonian Lutheranism', and an end to, as he put it himself, 'these polemical discourses' (p. 179).

Heylyn was not promoted on the Restoration; Milton puts this down to a range of factors such as his near blindness, competition, favour for those of more moderate views and the wooing of moderate Calvinists. Again, however, the lack of an obvious patron is cited, a running theme throughout Heylyn's career. But Heylyn remained active and indeed set out on perhaps his most major works under his own initiative, returning to his key role as a historian. *The Ecclesia Restaurata*, *Cyprianus Anglicus* and *Aerius Redivivus* (published after his death) employed material from writers like Thomas Fuller and the Catholic Nicholas Sander, but pulled together the now typical, and fully developed, Heylyn story of the English Reformation that firmly praised Elizabeth over Edward VI and dared to disagree with Foxe.

What emerges from this study is a complex writer, fiercely independent, and stubborn in defence of his principles. Heylyn knew what he did not like and that included Parliament, Puritans, Presbyterians and anyone critical of the Church of England of the 1630s. Royalist though he was, however, this did not render him uncritical of royalty and he was one of the first to lay the blame for events firmly on the shoulders of Charles I rather than the usual story of evil counsellors. Heylyn valued the Church of England as an independent source of power and was a firm supporter of Convocation. Right to the end, Milton exposes contradictions in his thinking, however, for by making Puritans the enemy, Heylyn could not come to terms with the moderate Calvinist bishops so prominent in the reign of James I. His view of the Reformation

eventually did give more credit to continental influences, but it was still a very insular affair of which to be proud.

Anthony Milton has succeeded admirably in bringing out the complexity and development of Heylyn's writings over a long career. He has done that by careful attention to those works, elucidating for the reader the critical themes that bind the whole body of work together. Never are we as bogged down in the material as many an opponent must have felt. If there are quibbles, they relate to a thirst for a little more. While this serves as an admirable synthesis of career and writings, it does whet the appetite for a full biography. And this is still the case even though Milton has written eloquently on Heylyn for the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. A chronology and critical bibliography of Heylyn's published works would have been useful as a checklist for the reader, for even though these are available elsewhere in several standard bibliographical works, they have not been pulled together for easy reference. This writer would have valued more discussion of how Milton views the forays of other modern scholars in this field – and even a little more about Heylyn at Westminster Abbey about which he and Julia Merritt know so much. Yet nothing can take away from the detailed, close reading and careful synthesis that has been given to Heylyn's writings placed firmly in context. This book will long remain essential reading for scholars of this period.

The author would like to thank Dr Foster for this kind review and is pleased to accept it without further comment.

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