

BRIDGET HEAL AND OLE GRELL (EDS.), *The Impact of the European Reformation. Princes, Clergy and People*. Ashgate, Aldershot 2008, 326 pp., 4 b/w ill. and 1 map. ISBN 9780754662129. £ 60.

For a considerable period an almost irresistible centrifugal force has been at work in Reformation studies, the main consequence of which has been a fragmentation of attention upon an increasing variety of particular and ever more specialized questions and concerns. The notable contribution to the field made by Bridget Heal's and Ole Grell's collection of twelve substantial and scholarly essays is to exert a centripetal counter-weight to this prevailing tendency. This is not an easy task, and the risk is simply to gather together a disparate combination of various themes and points of view and apply a collective label to them. Fortunately, *The Impact of the European Reformation. Princes, Clergy, and People* avoids this pitfall and offers a simultaneously coherent yet expansive perspective on the subject, both geographically and chronologically, with pieces addressing cultural settings from Scotland to Transylvania and covering the period 1520 to 1690. This anthology of current scholarship arises from a series of symposia organized by The Renaissance and Early Modern Research Group at the Open University and St Andrews Reformation Institute at St Andrews University, the latter also the sponsor of the prolific Ashgate series to which this volume makes another admirable contribution. The essays are representative of diverse thematic directions in the field including studies of the Reformation's impact on political, social, and intellectual culture. The collection is divided into three principal categories. The first set of four essays titled "Princes" addresses the impact of the Protestant Reformation on the relation between rulers and ruled; a second group of four investigates the changing role of the "Clergy" and the broader condition of life in an institutional church; the third and final part is largely concerned with issues of knowledge and belief among the laity, distinguished into the populace at large and the intellectual elite, with particular reference to the influence of the Reformation on developments in natural science and the book trade.

The overall theme of the volume is revisionist in tone. The aim of these essays, we are told by the editors, is to demonstrate the limitations of Max Weber's notion of the disenchantment of the world. And indeed the essays share a sense of the importance of paying due respect to the continuity of Reformation culture with the medieval past, with particular emphasis upon the 'accommodation' of the Reformation to traditional institutions, modes of behaviour, and patterns of thought. When Bridget Heal asserts in the peroration to her Introduction that "there is no place left in Reformation studies" for

the thesis of 'disenchantment,' one might be inclined to some degree of scepticism. Charles Taylor has recently demonstrated in his seminal study *A Secular Age* (2007), as well as in some of his earlier books, that a communitarian identity need not be interpreted as inherently inconsistent with the moral ontology of modernity. Weber and the Whig historians no doubt have their limitations, but the revisionist reaction does pose corresponding difficulties. Indeed the phenomena commonly identified as moves towards "secularization and modernization" are themselves, Taylor argues, motivated by religious concerns. In the context of the Reformation and its aftermath it is without a doubt a fallacy to oppose religion to secular culture, institutions, science, or philosophy, yet the religious discourse of the reformers may nonetheless be the key preparation to a process of de-sacralisation. The secular as we have come to know it today presents itself most frequently in opposition to religious concerns, and the revisionist hermeneutic tends to proceed from this presupposition. Yet for Taylor, the religious discourse of the Reformation plays a primary role in defining the 'moral ontology' of an emerging, early-modern civil society. Indeed it is arguable that modern secularity is at root a fundamentally religious, even *theological* orientation, whether or not it knows itself to be so, and this orientation is in good measure the achievement of the Reformation. By referring to Taylor I aim to suggest that a 'post-revisionist' perspective may well be on the horizon for students of the Reformation.

There is a wide range of scholarly experience among the contributors to this volume, and it exhibits throughout an impressively high standard of scholarship. In particular, this reader was impressed by Scott Dixon's account of 'The Politics of Law and Gospel: the Protestant Prince and the Holy Roman Empire' and Adam Mosley's treatment of the successive phases of the Copernican revolution in his essay titled 'The Reformation of Astronomy' and by Margo Todd's fascinating account of the remarkable resilience among the Scots of belief in fairies in conjunction with officially sanctioned Calvinism. The theme of the lengthening of the 'process of disenchantment' is ably continued by Alexandra Walsham in her piece on 'Sacred Spas? Healing Springs.' This is a fine collection of essays and highly recommended reading for scholars and students of the European Reformation.

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