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Thomas F. Mayer, ed. Reforming Reformation

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Thomas F. Mayer, ed. *Reforming Reformation*

Reforming Reformation by Thomas F. Mayer

Review by: Robert BireleySJ

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Catholic Christendom, 1300–1700. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xiv + 252 pp. \$119.95. ISBN: 978–1–4094–5154–9.

This volume grew out of an interdisciplinary conference held at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, in October 2010. The main purpose of the conference was to explore new insights into the Reformation era. Included in the volume are ten papers. The two most significant are Brad Gregory's "Reforming the Reformation: God's Truth and the Exercise of Power" and John Frymire's "German Catholics, Catholic Sermons, and Roman Catholicism in Reformation Germany: Reconfiguring Catholicism in the Holy Roman Empire." Both papers provide a foretaste of important books by each author that have since appeared, Gregory's *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Reformation Secularized Society* (2012) and Frymire's *The Primacy of the Postils: Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (2010).

Brad Gregory argues persuasively that we can only achieve a proper perspective on the Protestant Reformation if we take into equal account the radical as well as the magisterial reformations. What distinguished the Protestant Reformation from late medieval reform efforts was that the reform of doctrine was considered necessary; the many abuses in the Church resulted from the many human traditions that had become a source of doctrine beyond the holy scriptures. What was needed was a return to the scriptures, to *sola Scriptura*. This became the predominant Protestant rallying cry. But starting in the 1520s the Reformers disagreed on what the scripture said about fundamental Christian doctrines; it did not "interpret itself" as they often claimed. What distinguished the magisterial reformations — that is, the Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Anglican — is that they secured the support of the state(s) for their interpretations of scripture, and so there emerged the major Christian confessions, which had a much greater social impact. But the radical reformation with its proliferation of sects, peaking in Germany in the 1520s and in England in the 1640s, revealed the true dynamic of *sola Scriptura*. The magisterial reformations were the exception, not the rule, in the development of the Reformation. This is confirmed by the situation that developed when the government did not fully support a brand of Protestantism as in the Dutch Republic and later in the United States — the sects multiplied.

John Frymire contends that a study of the Catholic postils or sermon collections for Sundays and feast days to be found in German libraries will tell us

a lot more about the practice of Catholicism in Germany from the 1520s to about 1590 when the Counter-Reformation really set in after the arrival of the Jesuits and the completion of the Council of Trent. Frymire believes that this period of German Catholicism has been understudied, and he certainly does open up a valuable source for the period that should stimulate considerably more research. But he may draw too rosy a picture of parish life in the territories that did remain Catholic, and he underestimates the role that the Jesuits and the papacy played in the Catholic reform in Germany long before 1590. Peter Canisius's catechisms, the Great, the Small, and the Little, all appeared in Germany before 1560, to be reissued again and again, and Jesuit colleges, which were also pastoral centers, had been founded in Vienna, Prague, Ingolstadt, Munich, Trier, Dillingen, and Graz by 1573. Furthermore, Frymire states that only after 1650 did German Catholicism become "Roman Catholicism." In my opinion, precisely the opposite is the case. After the political decline of the papacy following the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the relatively rapid reconstruction in Germany, the imperial church reemerged more self-confident and less dependent on Rome.

In other contributions, Peter Marshall discusses the difficulty of applying the "confessionalization thesis" to England, and the late Ronald Thiemann begins to outline a theory of secularization that he planned to develop in a book. Lu Ann Homza stresses the importance of the local and the particular for the study of Spanish religious history. Early biographers of John of the Cross, Jodi Bilinkoff writes, while acknowledging his mystical gifts and spiritual depth, portrayed him as often a controversial and divisive religious superior. According to Anne Overell, "soul talk," that is, confession, counsel, or conversation, helped individuals to deal with the issues of conscience that arose because of the religious changes in England from roughly 1540 to 1560. John Edwards evaluates the role of the Spanish Dominican Bartolomé Carranza for Cardinal Pole's restoration of the Catholic faith in England under Mary Tudor, and Abigail Brundin and Marcia Hall argue that the negative impact of the Inquisition and the Council of Trent on Italian vernacular literature and painting, respectively, has been exaggerated, thus confirming the direction of recent research. This is a rewarding volume.

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