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REVIEWS

James D. Tracy, *Europe's Reformations, 1450–1650* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 1999) xx + 387 pp., 2 maps, 87 ill.

In this excellent survey, James Tracy provides a concise and balanced account of what he terms the “religious revolution of the sixteenth century.” Tracy is a well-respected professor of history at the University of Minnesota and brings years of scholarly work on early modern Europe to his account of the complicated developments of the Reformation period. With lively and readable prose, Tracy sketches the outlines of Protestant and Catholic reforms alike across the breadth of Europe from the 1450s until the 1650s. Providing a lucid account of the Reformation’s medieval roots, sixteenth-century climax, and often-unintended religious, social, and political consequences, *Europe's Reformations* represents an outstanding introduction for both students and non-specialists.

In order to examine the succession of complex multilayered processes that scholars term the Reformation, Tracy splits his narrative into three separate thematic sections. He begins each of these sections with an examination of the late medieval background, followed by chapters on Reformation-era developments, first in the Holy Roman Empire and then in other areas of Europe. In fact, one of the main strengths of the book is its emphasis on the important continuities between late medieval Europe and the multi-confessional societies of the early modern period. The first thematic section of *Europe's Reformations* concerns religious issues. Chapters in this section, perhaps the strongest part of the text, chart the abortive reform movements of the fifteenth-century, Martin Luther’s role in the Reformation, and the growing split between Wittenberg, Zurich, and Geneva. Tracy is at his best in explaining the divergent paths of these Protestant sects, as well as their relationship to resurgent Catholicism and Anabaptist radicalism.

The second major section in Tracy’s account deals with the role of the confessional state in these religious developments, especially how political and religious developments were inextricably linked during the Reformation era. After a brief account of the pivotal Wars of Italy (1494–1559), Tracy analyzes the struggles between the Habsburg emperors and their Protestant foes during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, highlighting the manner in which religious considerations affected major policy decisions. He closes this section with a concise examination of the role of political consolidation and state interference in reform movements that occurred in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Austria, and England.

In the third section, Tracy looks at the impact of religious reform within society, providing an excellent overview of the effect of religious change upon contemporary notions of community and social institutions like organized poor relief. Here he does an exceptional job of synthesizing recent scholarship, scholarship that accentuates the inherent similarities between the social reforms pursued by Reformation-era Protestants and Catholics. Less satisfying, however, is Tracy’s conclusion, where he attempts to situate Europe’s reformations in a “global perspective.” Given the brevity of this final chapter, the parallels he draws between religious reforms in early modern Europe and fundamentalist movements in eleventh-century China, eighteenth-century Islam and Judaism,

and eighth-century Byzantium, appear superficial at best. The impulse to place Europe's reformation experience in a global context is admirable, but Tracy's rather hesitant comparisons between such disparate essentialist movements as Muslim attempts to privilege the Koran over *hadith* in the eighteenth century and Luther's *sola scriptura* of the sixteenth seem, to this reader at least, to be a bit of a stretch.

Overall, however, Tracy's readily accessible introduction to the pivotal changes in European religion and society, 1450–1650, makes *Europe's Reformations* ideal for students or non-specialists. Synthesizing the mountain of recent literature on the Reformation era, Tracy allows such readers to gain a ready understanding of the roots, events, and outcomes of the Reformation. A wealth of well-chosen contemporary woodcuts and paintings complement the text, helping to bring the narrative to life. As an introductory text intended for a wide audience, *Europe's Reformations* stands among the best single-volume accounts of the period. Not surprisingly, the usefulness of such an introductory account for graduates students preparing for exams or conducting research is somewhat limited, owing to its rather sparse endnotes and lack of historiographical detail. In the classroom, on the other hand, specialists will no doubt find *Europe's Reformations* helpful as either a textbook or teaching tool, as it establishes the chronology and major developments of the Reformation period with a commendable combination of clarity and insight.

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