

Reformation Now

WILLIAM MONTER

Northwestern University (Emeritus)

Bridget Heal. *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Early Modern Germany: Protestant and Catholic Piety, 1500–1648*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 358 pp, hb \$103.99. ISBN-13: 9780521871037.

Benjamin J. Kaplan. *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. 432 pp, hb \$29.95, ISBN-13: 9780674024304; pb \$18.95. ISBN-13: 9780674034730.

James Simpson. *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. 368 pp, hb \$27.95. ISBN-13: 9780674026711.

Kirsi Stjerna. *Women and the Reformation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2009. 280pp, hb \$94.95. ISBN-13: 9781405114226; pb 34.95, ISBN -13: 9781405114233.

The reviewer admits to a mild case of amnesia, not having taught the age of the Protestant and Catholic reformations in this millennium. In addition, this effort represents a very brief and timid dip into a bit of the deep waters of recent scholarship: I have sampled only a very few of several possible recent titles, all issued by prestigious presses. But I can report that the Protestant Reformation has survived, and probably even benefited from, the ecumenical second half of the twentieth century. It has reacted to the feminist challenge by incorporating feminist scholarship—probably a necessary step. It even seems in reasonably good shape, judging from the fact that a large majority of the 150 panels about to be presented during the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference at Geneva in April 2009 still deal with religious subjects.

I shall discuss these four works by moving from the most narrowly-focused to the broadest-gauged and from the least to the most noteworthy:

1. More than thirty years after first dipping into Roland Bainton's elegantly-written three-volumes of biographical profiles entitled *Women of the Reformation*,¹ I enjoyed a truly retro experience leafing through Stjerna's volume with an almost identical title (which incidentally tells me that Bainton's work has also been reprinted as recently as 2001).² It is specifically designed for the women who will ensure the continuation of Protestant seminaries and ministries while learning about their historical marginalization by its founding fathers, but employs basically the same method as Bainton, concentrating on "mainstream" Protestant women worthies of the sixteenth century. Excluded are the confessionally-incorrect, although undeniably brave, Anabaptist female prophets and martyrs on the left, and the single most important woman in the history of sixteenth-century Protestantism on the right (Elizabeth I "had her own reasons to remain in public as asexual and neutral in religious matters as possible" (17). Probably the most valuable section of the work is its bibliography, which offers impressive testimony to the depth of scholarship produced by the generation working after Bainton.

2. James Simpson, a senior professor of English at Harvard by way of Australia, proposes to break a lance attacking what he polemically calls "English Bible-reading fundamentalism" through a close investigation of the circumstances surrounding its birth in the England of Henry VIII, Thomas More, and William Tyndale. While it is always laudable to watch one's academic neighbors make an effort to venture into intellectual and social history, this work is by far the lightest of these three. It is elegant (what else can one expect from an author with these credentials?) but somehow seems destined to become as ephemeral as the polemical works by More and Tyndale which it dissects. There are no intellectual heroes here, only a single omnipresent villain.

Simpson's polemical stance adopts the egregious tactic of frequently viewing Tyndale through the lens of a major uncritical recent admirer, David Daniell, who serves as the author's surrogate defender of Tudor-era Biblical "fundamentalism." Here lays the book's heart, filling half of its eight chapters, sandwiched between a brief retelling of the heroic age of English Bible translation and a profile of More as his rhetorical strategies increasingly came to resemble those of his heretical enemies. For a

historian, one of Simpson's most satisfying chapters revolves around the essentially ahistorical approach of early Evangelical Biblicism.

A narrowly British focus deprives Simpson of the reflection that Protestantism is not the only, and much less the first, scripturally-bound major religion. To Anglo-American readers, the term "fundamentalism" evokes Iran rather than Utah. (Simpson might retort that non-Arabic versions of the Koran are officially prohibited for believers, so for them his topic of "vernacular fundamentalism" becomes an oxymoron.) A third major book-based religion, similarly omitted here, Judaism is much older than either Christianity or Islam. But none of Simpson's intellectual players considered it, nor did Henry VIII until he became deeply enmeshed in Old Testament textual glosses during his divorce proceedings.

Looming in the background is a purely academic nemesis, the power of representations. Simpson deplores that the "historiographical default position" of humanistic scholarship since the 1980s has been that "everything is constructed" and warns against "forever relocating 'reality' into the field of 'representation' when we are dealing with how threats to life were experienced" (67). As Simpson and his readers know, both of his major protagonists, More the relentless persecutor of heretics and Tyndale the Bible translator, experienced public executions within a few years of each other.

Discussing More's precocious activism against Lutheran heresy, Simpson briefly evokes (47) his personal leadership of a raid on London's Steelyard, which lodged Hanseatic merchants from Germany, in December 1525, and the subsequent ceremony at London's cathedral where four German merchants abjured heresy on pain of death while their books were burned. As this detail reminds us, early Protestantism, from its name downwards, was originally German; and we accordingly turn to German-centered essay in comparative religious history.

3. After the obligatory introduction to the state of her subject around 1500, Bridget Heal's meticulously-textured investigation of the cultural impact of the Virgin Mary effectively begins where Simpson ends, around the mid-sixteenth century as Luther's Reformation hardened into institutional rigidity. Here we confront a carefully revised version of a 2001 doctoral thesis, done under the supervision of a leading

social historian, Robert Sribner, and revised after his death under guidance from his star pupil, Lyndal Roper. Heal's research design becomes simultaneously biconfessional and trilateral, comparing and contrasting the post-Reformation religious situation of the Virgin Mary in three carefully-selected major German free cities: Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Cologne.

The first was Germany's largest biconfessional city, an early convert to Zwingli's form of Reformation rather than Luther's, but divided after 1555 between Lutherans and Catholics; it provided material for some of Germany's sharpest contrasts between Protestant and Catholic devotional practices, including those involving Mary. The second was Germany's first major city to adopt Lutheranism and it governed a sizable rural hinterland; both developments tended to produce more cautious responses to traditional forms of Marian devotion, for example keeping about forty *hausmadonnen* (sculpted house signs depicting the Virgin) into the mid-nineteenth century (23). Her third city, Cologne, was the only major Catholic free city. It remained deeply traditional and uninterested in the kinds of militant Counter-Reformation, Jesuit-led forms of Marian devotion that became dominant in biconfessional Augsburg.

Fortified by scholarship emerging between her thesis and her book, especially Beth Kreitzer's *Reforming Mary*,³ which demonstrated a sharp downgrading of Mary in Lutheran sermons after 1550, Heal sustains her approach convincingly. It is, for example, useful and pertinent to note the different Protestant responses to both venerable and newer feast days honoring the Virgin. Augsburg kept only one while Nuremberg maintained three, and traditionalist Cologne kept seven.

Gender history is deftly managed in Heal's final chapter, which once again softens the oversimplified dichotomy between the powerless and insignificant Protestant mother of Jesus and the militaristic Jesuit-promoted Queen of Heaven leading Catholic armies. Catholic women expressed more agency than Protestants, sometimes with a Marian tinge: Cologne's Margareta Lynnerie founded a community of devout virgins in the 1590s where the Mother of God "was to be emulated in daily life, [but] not imitated in fervent visions" (273–274).

4. Last but not best comes Benjamin Kaplan's valuable and persuasive

reformulation of the outdated “rise of toleration” hypothesis. His well-written and broadly-gauged exploration of the modalities of confessional coexistence from the early Protestant Reformation to 1800 downplays the importance of the eighteenth-century “Enlightenment” while emphasizing the various processes of accommodation tried out almost everywhere that rival Christian confessions lived in close proximity to one another. This book could only have been written by someone grounded in Dutch history—a land where confessional coexistence was uniquely vital to political survival and where the eighteenth century is perceived as an age of relative decline, an “age of silver” following an “age of gold”—and its author teaches in both London and Amsterdam.

Kaplan precedes the central section of his triptych with a sketch of the mutual exclusivity of various churches in post-Reformation Europe. This is now very well-explored terrain, thanks to the proliferation of studies of “confessionalization” (into which Heal’s monograph fits), but it is a necessary prelude for a secularized European and American audience, because it emphasizes the seriousness of the problem that results from combining “no salvation outside the true church” with “compel them to enter,” both of which were truisms for sixteenth-century Christendom.

The heart of Kaplan’s account is an elegant, richly-developed description and analysis of the workings of three major strategies (suburban churches, secret churches, and shared churches) which developed after Luther’s Reformation had hardened into rival confessional churches whose members lived in close proximity to each other, often in neighboring villages or even inside the same set of city walls. Such situations, Kaplan points out, existed almost everywhere in Europe north of the Iberian and Italian peninsulas (a solidly Catholic bloc, policed by state Inquisitions) and south of Scandinavia (a solidly Lutheran bloc). He calls the three most workable strategies by their contemporary names (*Auslauf*, *Schuilkerk*, and *Simultaneum*) and introduces each with an especially vivid local example: Herstal, a suburban church serving the large Lutheran population of late sixteenth-century Vienna; “Our Lady of the Attic,” the best-preserved and one of the largest secret Catholic churches in Amsterdam; and Biberach’s single well-preserved parish

church, which served both the Lutheran and Catholic congregations of this small Imperial free city.

I had no idea of the extent of these practices across the heat of Europe before reading this section. For example, I knew that his leading example of a concealed Catholic church in seventeenth-century Amsterdam had become a museum, but I had not realized there were about twenty others functioning in the city at the same time, with proportionately smaller numbers in other major Dutch cities. It is also instructive to read Kaplan's tales about Heal's three exemplary cities. Augsburg, a much-studied city, fills eight lines in his index and provides some of his most interesting information about religiously-mixed marriages, including the memorable example of twins where the boy was raised Lutheran and the girl Catholic (281, 284, 288). Nuremberg served to illustrate "the high degree of sacral unity a city could achieve" through the Reformation and subsequently handled the problem of confessional coexistence through two "satellite communities" outside its walls, one for Jews and the other for French Huguenots (62, 169–170). At Cologne, Lutherans acquired a "secret, oppressed house-church" by the late sixteenth century; its Reformed Protestants subsequently developed two or three, for linguistic rather than doctrinal reasons. And, in 1716, its Catholic students went on a raid beyond the city's border in order to destroy a Calvinist church being built in Protestant territory (183–184, 166–167).

I never expect to encounter a more persuasive explanation of why certain kinds of non-official Protestant churches should be partially (but not completely) concealed, nor a more sophisticated discussion of why non-Christian communities of this era not only accepted but generally welcomed their spatial segregation. The central part of *Divided by Faith* (chapters 5–8, headed "Arrangements") should be required reading for anyone teaching an undergraduate course on Reformation Europe. If your students are motivated elitists, assign it; if they are captive time-servers, steal a lecture or two from it. The same advice applies to his tenth chapter on conversions and mixed marriages.

Nobody sees everything. Kaplan offers an excellent summary of the treatment of Europe's Jews, while Orthodox Christians receive only negligible attention. It seems significant that Kaplan pays consider-

able attention to the peculiar circumstances of both Jews and Muslims in the city of Venice, by far the most tolerant oasis in Mediterranean Europe, but says virtually nothing about its numerous Greek Orthodox residents. This account also pays little attention to the social history of the Uniate church in Catholic Poland or the difficult conditions afflicting “Old Believers” in Europe’s easternmost reaches. I also wish Kaplan had been able to discuss the situation in Europe’s largest traditionally-Christian city under long-term Islamic rule during this period. When Budapest fell to the Ottomans in 1541, its Latin Christian population fled *en masse*; after its bloody reconquest by a Christian army 150 years later, most of its Orthodox residents fled.

Kaplan also overlooked the only occasion in Reformation-era Europe when a sovereign territory split itself along purely religious lines. The relatively small Swiss canton of Appenzell divided into Protestant and Catholic micro-states at its annual general assembly in 1597, after reaching complete political deadlock over a fundamental political decision: whether or not to accept a perpetual military alliance with the Spanish monarchy (Appenzell’s Catholics pointed out that the alternative meant introducing taxation). The result created two intertwined “half-cantons” which still exist today, providing material for numerous jokes from their neighbors about Protestant/Catholic differences.

Looking back at how I sketched the so-called “rise of toleration” over 25 years ago, I am genuinely delighted that the current generation of Reformation historians has been able to describe and rearrange it with such subtlety and richness of detail. Benjamin Kaplan has made a convincing case for the significance of the various subterfuges through which Reformation-era Europeans persuaded themselves to accommodate religious diversity long before their leading cultural values became secularized. I wish I could have written such a work myself.

Notes

1. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971.
2. Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing, 2001.
3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.