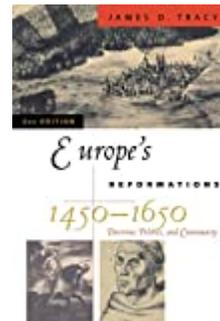


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James D. Tracy. *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650: Doctrine, Politics, and Community.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. xviii + 369 pp. \$26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-3789-7.



Reviewed by Sean F. Dunwoody (Department of History, University of Chicago)

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Revised or Not, a Continued Boon for Readers

When the first edition of James Tracy's *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650* appeared in 1999, instructors and college students were quite fortunate to have a textbook that offered such a concise, learned synthesis of the Reformation written in a fluid and enjoyable style. In the years since, the field of "Reformation studies" has been graced with numerous overviews and compendia. Some, like Diarmaid MacCulloch's *Reformation* (2003), rightly impress scholars, but may well overwhelm many undergraduate readers. Others, for instance Ulinka Rublack's *Die Reformation in Europa* (2003), present innovative, challenging interpretations of the Reformation, but with a decidedly narrower scope. Still others, such as the *Companion to the Reformation World* (2004), edited by R. Po-chia Hsia, offer a truly global scope with a dizzying variety of approaches, but lack overarching synthesis. Even in this now more competitive field, Tracy's textbook continues to distinguish itself, because the author gives his readers pith, breadth, and scholarship in a textbook format.

The publishers of this text, Rowman and Littlefield, have now issued what is being marketed, on the back

cover, as a "revised edition" including "new material." The appearance of this new edition presents an opportunity for renewed review of how Tracy addresses the challenge of writing a textbook synthesis in today's far more heterogeneous field of Reformation studies. This review, it is hoped, will also provide readers, especially those who already know and perhaps use the first edition, with a sense of how much "new" this new edition offers.

In his introductory part 1, Tracy begins by discussing the medieval context of religious heterodoxy. Next, he introduces the heuristic framework guiding his synthesis of the Reformation as a *European* phenomenon. This framework is defined by six "distinctive features" which characterize the Protestant movement as a whole (p. 13), and these are the focal points of the synthesis that follows. Some of these are "classic" features of Protestantism, such as *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and the priesthood of all believers. Other features—the confessional state, the holy community, and reform of worship and religious practice—allow consideration of Protestantism and Catholicism alike. While offering an analysis that

crosses the divides of the confessional churches is now *de rigueur*, Tracy proves himself quite adept at placing due emphasis with an even hand.

These archetypal features of the reformations (Tracy uses the terms “reform,” “the Reformation,” and “R/reformations” interchangeably for all confessional churches throughout the text) are then examined through the main three parts of the book, parts 2 through 4. Though these focus in turn upon dogma, political history, and cultural and social history, they all, Tracy argues, tell a single story. Yet despite the interconnectedness of the three, Tracy does not opt for a presentation within a single trajectory, as they defy being “captured by a single narrative line” (p. 12).

The first main part (part 2), dedicated in name to dogma, embeds the course of religious heterodoxy in a review of medieval scholarship and piety, follows its course in a brief account of Martin Luther’s challenge of the Church, and sets it against a political history of the Empire under Charles V and of Scotland, Switzerland, and Transylvania. Though Tracy does indicate where doctrinal differences generated rifts between Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Calvinists, this part of the book is dominated by the political history of those places and situations where these differences surfaced.

The next part of the book (part 3) is even more straightforwardly political history, with a focus first on conflicts between states and dynasties, rulers, and princes from the Wars of Italy until the Peace of Westphalia, then on the internal politics of Austria, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, and Poland-Lithuania. Finally, Tracy closes this part with a chapter on the history of the Reformation and the domestic political history of England down to the Restoration. European, indeed!

In the final part of the book (part 4), Tracy is generally successful in his portrayal of the Reformation as it affected fundamental social categories and cultural practices. He manages to include a great deal of material in a short space: in one chapter, he provides an outline of early modern society, with its orders; economic trends; Roman clergy and Church; family structure; and social unrest. This is followed by an examination of how Luther and his followers inflected notions of the “common man,” of the Godly community, and of poor relief, and, finally, how Calvinism and Catholicism did the same. Yet, for all of its brevity, Tracy succeeds in informing his readers without losing them in a maelstrom of facts. This is said less as a euphemism for jejune simplification than as a commendation of Tracy’s deft hand and clear writing.

The book closes with a rather curious coda. In the briefest of terms, Tracy summarizes the traditions of religious renewal in Neo-Confucianism, Hasidic Judaism, Wahhabiyism, and Byzantine iconoclasm. Tracy argues that “these sketches may suffice to suggest how reform movements in quite different traditions can resemble one another” (p. 309). For all of his emphasis on historical contextualization elsewhere in the book, however, this closing chapter suggests a decidedly ahistorical understanding of religion and of the motivations and manifestations of religious renewal at odds with the rest of the text.

Since this is also a review of a second edition, one marketed as a “revised” edition, it is worth taking a few moments to survey exactly what this new edition offers that the first edition did not. First, the first edition’s endnotes have been removed, having been either folded into the body of the text or modulated into a new glossary at the rear. The glossary is not comprehensive, but it will likely prove helpful to many college students. The publishers should, however, have made the effort to highlight incidences of glossed terms in the text itself to aid user-friendliness. Next, the bibliography has been amended, with some thirty-odd titles added, especially on the cultural history of the Reformation and on east-central Europe. Yet, without the first edition’s endnote references to individual titles and without any annotation or guide to further study, it is unclear exactly how a college student with otherwise little background in the historiography is expected to make head from tails of the sixteen-page bibliography. Here, again, some effort should have been made to link it to the text. Finally, the text is nearly entirely identical. Fulfilling the claim made on the back cover, “this revised edition includes new material on Eastern Europe, on how ordinary people experienced religious change, and on the pluralistic societies that began to emerge.” But the roughly 10 new pages of text (out of a total of 310 pages of text) on Poland-Lithuania and Transylvania, on penance in Catholicism, on conscience formation in all confessions, and on religious pluralism in Colmar do not amount to any large-scale reworking of the first edition’s text. Some of what at first blush appears new is, in fact, the contents of the defunct endnotes now incorporated into the text. Otherwise, revision was nearly entirely limited to the adding of new material.

In sum, the core of this second edition is not very different from the first edition. As such, it remains an excellent overview for college-level students. The clarity and strength of Tracy’s prose is highly laudable and his

attempt to do justice to the heterogeneous field of Reformation studies and its historiographic concerns (though, without bibliographic references) is generally quite masterful. He has done an admirable job in offering an exciting, enjoyable narrative, accurately gauged to its readership with well-selected illustrations. Nonetheless, it is both frustrating and a disservice to those readers that the first edition's factual infelicities were not addressed—one earlier reviewer listed ten on the same number of pages.[1] Other minor errors not included in that reviewer's list are repeated as well.

Instructors in search of a text for their undergraduate Reformation course will continue to be very well served by Tracy's text. They could, in turn, do the wallets of their students a service by assigning the first edition or permitting its usage for as long as it remains available.

Note

[1]. Christopher Haigh, "Review: *Europe's Reformations, 1450-1650*. By James D. Tracy," *English Historical Review* 116 (2001): 716-717.

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